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Old-Time Religion: Christian Experimentalism and Preaching to the “Unchurched”

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Struggle for Liberation through a montage of G.I. newspaper mastheads, footage of antiwar demonstrations at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and the ever-present Newsreel machine gun logo at the end. It's hard to believe that there was a time, not so long ago, when you could hold an antiwar demonstration on the grounds of a military base. I think that Alan Jacobs and I hoped that *The Army Film* would pave the way for a more diverse Newsreel aesthetic—one that had room for humor, and used archival material in a more creative way. It didn't happen. Newsreel's energy and resources were soon being devoted to longer, more ambitious projects like *Summer '68* and Robert Kramer's *Ice* (1970).

In a way, *The Army Film* probably marked the end of the early Newsreel style of short, inexpensive films that relied on found footage and voice-over rather than synchronous sound, and not the beginning of something new.

Forty years later, it's hard for me to remember that not much more than a year separated my Army experience from Newsreel, and only recently have I begun to understand how they informed each other and contributed to my growth as a filmmaker. The Army did this by putting me in a situation where I had to work with people whose class background and race were different from mine. Other than high school, the draftee Army of the mid-1960s was one of the few places in American society where you could do that, where, in fact, you had no other choice if you wanted to avoid being a total outcast. I also learned a few lessons about the power structure in American society.

Newsreel, of course, was more homogeneous than the military, in terms of class and race. Yet when I went out into the world with Newsreel films, I often found myself in front of audiences in churches, schools, or union halls that were not necessarily receptive to the films' message. I learned quickly how to respond to people who were angry and confused, and who didn't necessarily share my views on the Vietnam War, Cuba, or the liberation struggles in Africa. I learned to respect other people's viewpoints, even if I couldn't convince them of mine, and understood something about the power of images. Even the crudest Newsreel films could serve as a bridge, as a way to begin a dialogue. We used to joke that if you were really good, you could do a screening and

conduct a discussion with a reel of black leader with no images. I'd like to think that this experience of showing films in nontraditional settings made me a more aware filmmaker, and, hopefully, a better one.

In both the Army and Newsreel, I learned the importance of working with other people you could trust and depend on, and whose experience could teach you something. In the Army, of course, this can be a matter of life or death. For me, fortunately, it wasn't. Even though the kind of struggles we were involved in with Newsreel often felt like the world depended on their outcome, it didn't; but that doesn't mean that they lacked seriousness.

For all its faults, which were many and varied, Newsreel remains one of the most intense experiences in my life. It showed me that it was possible to create alternative ways of working as well as alternative media, and that resistance was never futile. In *The Army Film* I tried to come to terms with another experience that was intense in a quite different way, one that I don't yet quite fully understand. Making the film enabled me to express some of my feelings about the Army, to create a cautionary tale, if you will, and combine them with what I perceived to be Newsreel's politics in 1968. Looking at the film today I can see that this wasn't always an easy fit. Now though, through the generosity of the Pacific Film Archive and the Orphan Film Symposium, you can open up the time capsule and judge for yourselves.

Old-Time Religion: Christian Experimentalism and Preaching to the "Unchurched"

PAUL CULLUM

Growing up Methodist in Ft. Worth, Texas, in the 1970s, our favorite activity was to order 16mm films from a catalog that catered exclusively to church groups. There was the lugubriously surreal proto-Claymation of the Lutherans' *Davey and Goliath*, the weirdly prenatal cartoon specter *Jot* from the Southern Baptist Radio-TV Commission—even Saul and Elaine



"The Final Ingredient" (1965), a half-hour episode of the ABC series *Directions*, featuring a jazz score by composer David Amram from his Holocaust opera of the same name (based on an earlier 1959 teleplay by Reginald Rose).

Bass's secular 1969 Oscar-winning short *Why Man Creates*. But our favorite was a vaguely *Twilight Zone*-like parable where a bureaucratic snafu prevents Joseph Campanella from receiving his family's monthly allotment of food vouchers from the state. Thwarted at every turn by endless red tape (including some from a supercilious prosecutor played by Adam West), Campanella is seen in the final shot grimly receiving his next month's vouchers, only to reveal the arm of his suit jacket now hanging limp, presumably the source of his family's intervening sustenance. The elegance of such a payoff was like catnip to the twelve-year-old imagination.

Thirty-plus years later, after extensive research, no reference to it appeared to exist in the public record. Such wonders seemed lost to the folds of time. But then, home now being Los Angeles, none other than Mr. Campanella himself turned up in line at the video mecca Eddie Brandt's Saturday Matinee in North Hollywood. A talkative, still vital man in his early eighties, Mr. Campanella could recall the show, but not its provenance.

"I did dozens of these things," he says of the religious programs, for which his work was often essentially pro bono. "In the first place, it's work—whether they pay me or not, it doesn't matter. Plus I felt good about it."

Campanella suggested contacting producers of *The Lutheran Hour*, the long-running radio broadcast of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) in St. Louis.¹ Doing this in turn

opened a window onto the abandoned realm of half-hour religious anthology programming, often relegated to the predawn hours of Sunday morning, which existed for over thirty years in the limbo of television syndication. In a world where *The DaVinci Code* now courts favor with evangelical Christians, Fox Films launches a specialty division called FoxFaith, and Cloud Ten Pictures, producer of the millennialist *Left Behind* series, has a home on the Sony lot, it's striking to remember that mainstream religion once gave away its programming for free, as a means of spreading its message.

Beginning in the early 1950s and until the mid-eighties, when American broadcasting fell prey to deregulation and a host of other perils, mainstream Christian denominations often had their own narrative beachhead on weekly television. As mandated by the community service provisions of the Federal Communications Act of 1934, religious-themed network series were common: *Look Up and Live* and *Lamp Unto My Feet* on CBS, *Crossroads* and *Directions* on ABC, and syndicated fare like the LCMS' *This Is the Life*, the Southern Baptists' *This Is the Answer*, the Paulists' Catholic *Insight*, and the ecumenical Christophers' eponymous program. They presented veiled religious themes in the guise of contemporary social drama, often mimicking the live broadcasts of television's first golden age. When viewed today, the results are sometimes campy (as in *Look Up and Live*'s "The Delinquent, the Hipster, and the Square," with William Hickey as an ersatz beatnik), sometimes notable for their cast (James Dean appeared in both *Family Theatre*'s "Hill Number One" and *Crossroads*' "Broadway Trust"), and sometimes genuinely experimental (*Directions*' "The Final Ingredient," a half-hour operetta set at Christmas in a German POW camp, with a jazz score by David Amram). But all show a willingness to engage in what theologian H. Richard Niebuhr (brother of the famed Reinhold Niebuhr) termed the "Christ of culture," immersing themselves in secular issues of the day (*Christ and Culture*, Harper 1951).

Of these many programs, by far the most successful were *This Is the Life* and *Insight*, which featured well-known actors and won eight and five Emmys, respectively, including

acting, writing, and technical awards. *This Is the Life* began its thirty-seven-year run in 1952 on the DuMont Television Network with the recurring adventures of the Fisher family (as in “fishers of men”) and their friend Pastor Martin (as in “Martin Luther”), before switching to an anthology format four years later. It was an offshoot of *The Lutheran Hour*, which continues to broadcast Sunday sermons on radio. *This Is the Life* was originally produced on a Southern California soundstage in 35mm black-and-white film by the LCMS in conjunction with the Los Angeles–based company Family Films. Dr. Ardon Albrecht, the executive producer, recalls the founding strategy of Pastor Herman Gockel, whom he replaced in 1972.

“He thought in terms of a target that you would use for archery,” says Albrecht from his home in Simi Valley, an hour north of Los Angeles, halfway between the Ronald Reagan Library and the Spahn Movie Ranch, Charles Manson’s final redoubt. “We use the terms ‘unchurched’ and ‘half-churched’ to denote the outer circles—audiences who are either unfamiliar with our message, or else unfamiliar but sympathetic. That’s who we wanted to reach. The goal was not conversion.”

This meant that independent of the topical sitcoms of Norman Lear, such taboos as divorce, homosexuality, and child abuse were making their way into the half-hour format. As script advisor Dr. Elmer Knoernschild puts it in a history of the International Lutheran Layman’s League (which took over the show in 1967), “We didn’t talk about these things years ago. And we’d rather not do so today. But if we want to reach the world outside the church, we need to.”²

In 1972, returning from nine years of missionary work in Taiwan, Albrecht immersed himself in television, settling on the unlikely template of the Raymond Burr detective-in-a-wheelchair series *Ironside* as his moral compass. “I kept thinking some of those scripts, if there was a theologian working with them, they would make some pretty good Christian shows,” says Albrecht. “And I noted that the episodes I liked best had the name Sy Salkowitz as the writer or story editor.” According to Albrecht, in a meeting at Salkowitz’s home in Malibu, the veteran TV writer and future president of twentieth-century Fox Television told him, “I’ll write a script for

you, with the proviso that you will work with me on the Christian message.” The result, about a terminal patient whose family couldn’t accept his impending death, was shot on location in 2-inch color video and ushered in a new era of moral complexity, giving the series its second wind. (*This Is the Life* finally went off the air in 1988.)

But within the insular world of Christian drama, the gold standard was *Insight*, produced by a Catholic order, the Paulists, about which Bob Hope once declared, “A Paulist is a Jesuit who signs with the William Morris Agency.”³ Beginning in 1960, the year after *The Twilight Zone*, which it more than superficially resembled and with which it often shared writers, directors, and cast, *Insight* was the brainchild of Father Ellwood E. “Bud” Kieser (rhymes with *wiser*), a born showman and natural heir to Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, the cape-wearing Catholic clergyman whose *Life Is Worth Living* on Dumont and then ABC in the mid-50s was the only show to ever hold its own against Milton Berle, television’s first superstar. Father Kieser christened his series “the experimental theater of Hollywood” not only for its fiercely activist politics, which still seems radical four decades later, but also its



Father Ellwood “Bud” Kieser, the Paulist priest and born showman, introducing an episode of *Insight*. Courtesy of Paulist Productions.

willingness to allow young talent a chance to stretch the medium. Writers as diverse as Michael Crichton, Rod Serling, John Wells, *Exorcist* author William Peter Blatty, *Oz* creator Tom Fontana, and even noir novelist John Fante found a sympathetic berth for their talents under the watchful eye of Father Kieser.

"He was six-four. We called him the high priest," says Albrecht. "He was a brilliant man. My impression is that *Insight* worked at getting young new writers who were feeling frustrated at having to do the same old thing on commercial television, and saying, 'Come work for us, We'll give you carte blanche.' I'm sure Father Kieser molded them for his purposes."

Operating out of a Pacific Coast Highway headquarters that once housed the speakeasy of Prohibition-era comedienne Thelma Todd, the Paulists today specialize in biblical documentary programming for cable TV such as *Prophecies of Israel* for the History Channel or the eight-part *The Jesus Experience*, part of which aired on the Hallmark Channel. Founded in New York City in 1858 by five renegade members of the Redemptorists, the new order was created to follow the example of Saint Paul—he of the New Testament roadshow circuit—to minister specifically to non-Catholics. According to Father Frank Desiderio, Kieser's understudy and eventual successor (following Kieser's death from cancer in 2000), "Part of our history is what they called trailer missions, where they had Airstream trailers—one of which was purchased by Loretta Young [an actress once nicknamed "Attila the Nun" for her onscreen piety]—that were equipped with movie screens. They would go into some community in Tennessee that had never seen a Catholic priest, and they would put up placards all over town saying, 'Come see *King of Kings*,' where they would show the movie and answer questions. It was an outreach effort meant to 'undemonize' the Catholic Church in the Bible belt."

Taking that methodology to heart—"come for the movie, stay for the message"—Father Kieser opted to transfer his popular inquiry classes for potential converts first onto 16mm film, as a study aid, and then to television. When the lectures proved a bust, his own Saul-on-the-road-to-Tarsus-style epiphany led him to augment the shows with dramatic

vignettes, eventually reducing his presence to on-camera wraparounds. "Gradually, it went from all Bud to all drama," says Father Frank (as Desiderio is called).

Over its twenty-three-year run, *Insight* produced 233 episodes for syndicated broadcast, often relegated to the graveyard hours of Sunday morning between midnight and 6 a.m., when local stations would donate free airtime. The programs often starred modern-day household names—William Shatner, Gene Hackman, Carol Burnett, Bill Bixby, and, especially, Martin Sheen. Sheen's present-day liberal-to-radical Catholic activism comes out of a similar religious grounding. (Born Ramon Estevez, he took his professional surname from Bishop Fulton J. Sheen.) Many of the more programmatic *Insight* episodes found a mail-order afterlife in public schools. These often trafficked in gentle humor or religious allegory—God as an innkeeper (Harold Gould), a skip tracer (Hector Elizondo), a defendant in a class-action suit brought by the world's afflicted (Richard Beymer), or a hippie Christ (Beau Bridges)—a sample of which can be found in a six-tape, fifteen-episode collection, *Insight Classics*, available from Paulist Press.

But unimpeded by advertising or ratings pressure, other episodes found their way into creative tributaries largely unexplored in TV's recorded history: the eerie synthesizer theme, kitchen-sink existentialism, and Kieser's headmaster-as-superego commentaries, not to mention a core audience that would cling to



"The Hate Syndrome" (1966), an episode of *Insight* written by Rod Serling, about a Jewish-born neo-Nazi. Courtesy of Paulist Productions.

any flickering beacon in the middle of a dark night of the soul, created a kind of cult status-in-waiting. In some, like Rod Serling's "The Hate Syndrome," where a journalist confronts a neo-Nazi rabble-rouser with his Jewish past (a plot reminiscent of both the "He's Alive" episode of *The Twilight Zone* and the later film *The Believer*), *Twilight Zone's* speculative fables seem to be the operative template. Yet even that comparison falls short, as the lack of soundtrack music, production values, and easy O. Henry ironies conspire to make the drama even more surreal. In "All Out," contestants on a televised game show administer escalating acts of cruelty to loved ones—a slap in the face, confessions of some dark truth, culminating in a game of Russian roulette, with the players' partners, parents, and progeny the living wager. The next-to-last episode, "Game Room," aired in 1983, well into the Reagan era, features a video arcade where the American president and Soviet premier engage in nuclear brinksmanship for purposes of mass entertainment. And anyone familiar with William Peter Blatty's hyper-surreal novel *Twinkle Twinkle, Killer Kane* (1966) or its film adaptation *The Ninth Configuration* (1980) will spark to "The Man from Inner Space," starring Louis Gossett Jr., as a banjo-playing alien in a blue jumpsuit who claims to be God, wherein the U.S. president tells his Marine guards, "Start wearing cast-iron underwear, boys, because you're both in for the wildest reaming since Eva Braun had to tell Adolph Hitler she lost her diaphragm."

"The shows were originally produced on two-inch videotape and they would distribute them gratis to whoever would broadcast them," says Mark Quigley, manager of the Archive Research and Study Center, UCLA Film & Television Archive. Quigley and UCLA television archivist Dan Einstein removed four vans worth of material from the Paulist Productions offices, making UCLA the home of the *Insight* archives. "They would also distribute them to school and church groups via 16mm prints," says Quigley. "The interesting thing about these is that they're video drama, which when you look at it, you're used to seeing a soap opera aesthetic. But if you turn on an *Insight* by accident, you're suddenly thrust into this creepy netherworld, where human frailties are

at the forefront and people are struggling with morality. There are these *Insight* moments that you don't really see in television drama, where they go in and rip off the outer layer."

Kieser followed up the *Insight* series with several feature films. *Romero* starred Raul Julia as Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, a human rights advocate and champion of the poor who was assassinated in 1980 on the steps of his cathedral, allegedly by members of the country's right-wing death squads. Begun in 1985, it was finally released by Warner Bros. in 1989. This was followed by *Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story*, a 1996 biopic of the New York Catholic social worker of the 1930s, scripted by John Wells. Failing to find distribution, Kieser attempted to release the film city by city, and never recovered his costs.

"Within the American political spectrum, there is no Catholic party," says Father Frank of Kieser's firebrand politics. "So in terms of personal morality issues—abortion, sex outside of marriage—you would consider him to be a conservative. But in terms of social issues—taxing people to pay for food for the poor, butter not guns—he would fall more in the progressive liberal camp. There's even a line in *Entertaining Angels* where Dorothy Day, who was one of his great heroes, says, 'If you ask why people are poor, you're a communist; if you feed the poor, you're a saint. We do both, and we're neither.'"

This same impulse carried over to the Humanitas Prize, which Kieser founded in 1974 to encourage TV and now feature film writers to invest their work with a spiritual—or at least humanitarian—dimension. Cash prizes of between \$10,000 and \$25,000 are awarded annually in a variety of categories, while the Kieser Award (established after his death) has gone to Colin Callender of HBO Films and Larry Gelbart (*Oh, God!*, *MASH*). In 2006, a Special Award was presented to the Al Gore documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. In an episode from the final season of *The Sopranos*, burgeoning movie producer Christopher Moltisanti (Michael Imperioli) used a Humanitas statuette to brain a hapless screenwriter played by Tim Daly, himself a Humanitas awardee. Although not formally affiliated with the Paulists, the Humanitas Prize does share the same offices, and

originally depended in large part on Kieser's storied charisma.

In a promotional reel, *Oz* creator Tom Fontana, who wrote the 1985 Paulists TV movie *The Fourth Wise Man*, recounts Kieser's efforts to enlist previous Humanitas winners in ongoing events. "As your career goes up, he makes you give it all back—with interest," says Fontana. "Every time he says to me, 'I'm going to say a prayer tonight,' I know I'm doomed. Because once he starts praying, it's over for me. I have no defense. I can't counter-pray 'Dear God, please get Father Kieser off my back.'"

Deadwood and *John from Cincinnati* creator David Milch, who has won three Humanitas Prizes—one for his very first script (for *Hill Street Blues*), the money from which he famously used to buy a racehorse—remained a lifelong friend of Father Kieser's.

"He was a blessing to this community, and an extraordinarily positive force in my life—all unbeknownst to me right up to shortly before he died," says Milch. "What was unnerving was this genial simplicity that he thought somehow armed him adequately for everything that was sordid and inauthentic in this community. And he was right... You know, people out here are always playing the odds, and I suspect what most people thought was, 'Well, it's not very likely that there is a God, but why fucking piss him off?'"

But by the 1980s, programs like *Insight* were beginning to feel what one history of Lutheran broadcasting termed "the hot sun of deregulation."⁴ The growth of cable and satellite systems undercut the "spectrum scarcity" argument for making broadcasters public trustees of the airwaves. Amid the deregulation fervor of the Reagan era, the FCC abolished guidelines for nonentertainment programming requirements in 1985 and dissolved the Fairness Doctrine in August 1987. (When Congress tried to preserve it as law, Reagan vetoed the measure.) And the general trend toward consolidation of the media generally sounded the death knell for Mom and Pop-style syndication of all stripes.

"The 1946 FCC 'Blue Book' required all licensees to include nonprofit, public service, cultural and even controversial programs that could not be sponsored by advertising, and

one of the results of this public service mandate was religious programming," says UCLA professor John T. Caldwell, author of *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television*. When *All in the Family* producer Norman Lear mounted a successful court challenge to the "family viewing hour" moratorium on proscribed content, according to Albrecht, the spine of the Blue Book was broken, and with it any privileged status granted to religious programming.

"The mainline churches aren't really doing television any more," says Albrecht. "Most of the religious television is done by what I would call self-starters—somebody who decides, 'I think I'd do great on television. I'm sure great in the pulpit, and they love me.' And then it just ends up being self-promoting. There was the suggestion that we ask for money on the air. Meanwhile, the televangelists were rising up. They paid for the airtime, they asked their audiences for money, and it went from there."

"One insight I might offer is that the American culture is such that you don't exist unless you exist on television," says Father Frank. "And one group of people who were underrepresented on TV were evangelical Christians. And so they moved in, and by buying themselves a place at the television table, they bought themselves a place in the culture. Mainstream religion—Catholicism, Episcopalianism, whatever—it exists in the culture. And so I don't know if, once we got kicked off



And Then They Forgot God (1971) "preaches to the unchurched" by slipping stealth religion into the corners of the narrative frame.



Beverly Garland and Joseph Campanella in *And Then They Forgot God* (1971), produced by Family Films in partnership with the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod.

because of deregulation, there was the same kind of urgency to get back on the air.”

But what of the Joseph Campanella program that launched this whole quixotic quest? There seemed to be no record of it anywhere. Then Mr. Quigley called from the UCLA archives. A print warehouse called Modern Sound Pictures in Omaha, Nebraska, had a 16mm film of something called *And Then They Forgot God*, starring Campanella and Beverly Garland. Three weeks later, a rickety print arrived, faded to red and held together by masking tape, but more or less the way it existed in memory. Except the writer and director credits were mysteriously missing, victims of an artless splice. Traditional resources proved no help. The Lutherans’ Missouri Synod reported a Family Films production by that name possibly interred somewhere in their archives, but it wasn’t turning up in their searches. Actress Beverly Garland, recently deceased, but then owner of the Beverly Garland Holiday Inn (just down the road from Eddie Brandt’s), provided the name of Carl Delvecchio, a New York collector and her unofficial biographer, who might have a print. Then finally, on the same day, word arrived from both the Lutherans and Mr. Delvecchio that additional prints had surfaced.

And the writer-director of *And Then They Forgot God*?

Sy Salkowitz, Mr. Albrecht’s role model and literary benefactor.

So to Mr. Salkowitz—Jewish moralist, honorary Lutheran, and now hero to Methodists:

Thanks. It meant a lot.

List of Religious Programs

- Davey and Goliath* (1960–64, United Lutheran Church in America)
- Jot* (1965–74, Southern Baptist Radio–TV Commission)
- The Lutheran Hour* (1930–present, radio, LCMS)
- Family Theatre* (1951–57, Father Patrick Peyton’s Family Theater Productions)
- Look Up and Live* (1954–79, CBS)
- Lamp Unto My Feet* (1948–79, CBS)
- Crossroads* (1955–57, ABC)
- Directions* (1960–68, ABC)
- This Is the Answer* (1956–60, Southern Baptist Convention)
- Insight* (1960–83, Paulist Productions)
- The Christopher Program* (1952–69);
- Christopher Closeup* (1969–present)
- Life Is Worth Living, with Bishop Fulton J. Sheen* (1951–57, DuMont/ABC)
- This Is the Life* (1952–89, LCMS)

Source: J. Gordon Melton, Phillip Charles Lucas, and Jon R. Stone, *Prime-time Religion: An Encyclopedia of Religious Broadcasting*, Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1997.

And Then They Forgot God (1971, LCMS). Produced by Family Films; written and directed by Sy Salkowitz; starring Joseph Campanella, Beverly Garland, Johnny Seven, Howard Morris, Chelsea Brown, and Adam West. Thirty minutes. Distributed as a nontheatrical film and syndicated for local broadcast. A 16mm print and an access copy are on deposit at the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

NOTES

1. Lutheran congregations in the United States are divided into several church bodies. The moderately conservative, mostly Midwestern Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod claims nearly 2.5 million members (per LCMS.org). The United Lutheran Church in America, which sponsored the *Davey and Goliath* series in the

1960s, merged with others to form the less-conservative Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the 1980s (ELCA.org). The ELCA has approximately twice as many members as the LCMS.

2. Fred Pankow and Edith Pankow, *75 Years of Blessings and the Best Is Yet to Come!: A History of the International Lutheran Laymen's League* (St. Louis: Int'l LLL, 1992). Elmer J. Knoernschild's background in religious broadcasting included the self-published *Evangelism by Radio* (1948) and his narration of *The Lutheran Hour* radio series, excerpts of which were released on LPs by RCA Victor in 1958.

3. Mark Quigley, "Hollywood Priest's Legacy to the Archive," *UCLA Film and Television Archive Newsletter*, Oct.–Nov. 2004, 11. See also Ellwood Kieser, *The Spiritual Journey of a Showbusiness Priest* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1996).

4. Pankow and Pankow, *75 Years of Blessings and the Best Is Yet to Come!*.

Between Sign-Off Films and Test Patterns: *Insight* at UCLA

MARK QUIGLEY

As an addendum to Paul Cullum's preceding essay, this article details the UCLA Film & Television Archive's 2003 acquisition of the

twenty-three-year run of the religious television program *Insight*, and the ongoing efforts to ensure the long-term conservation, preservation, and accessibility of this significant collection of public service broadcasting.¹ Explicating UCLA's involvement, however, requires a personal anecdote. In the winter of 1994, jolted awake in the predawn hours by an unnerving aftershock to California's severe Northridge earthquake, I turned to my television for the reassuring local omniscience of Channel 7's Eyewitness News. Surprisingly, I found instead an eerie, obviously vintage teledrama featuring familiar actor Brian Keith hulking around a sparsely decorated set, devastated that his estranged son's bad LSD trip apparently contributed to a tragic murder. The episode, "The Sandalmaker" (1968), was unique in its earnestness and overtly grim tone—its 4:00 a.m. broadcast slot unsettling yet somehow appropriate. The end credits were equally stark—titles superimposed over an imposing religious statue (of St. Paul the Apostle) draped in shadow. The accompanying authoritative voice-over identified the series, its origin, and aim: "*Insight* is a production of the Paulist Fathers, a group of Catholic priests who serve their God by serving those outside their church."

Created, executive produced, hosted, and occasionally written by Paulist priest Father Ellwood E. Kieser (1929–2000), *Insight* was launched in 1960 and aired nationally in syndication for well over two decades, occasionally enjoying high-profile prime-time programming slots in major markets.² Over the course of *Insight*'s run, a remarkably diverse cross-section of Hollywood artists, from Irene Dunne to Flip Wilson, contributed their talents gratis to the dramatic series—drawn by the show's reputation for consistently stretching the creative boundaries of television. Offbeat and experimental by design, the lower-than-low-budget series won Emmy awards and received critical praise for addressing social issues (the Vietnam War, nuclear proliferation, and suicide, among others) from which network TV shied. The episodes often deployed black humor or stark realism, and nearly always with a humanist, as opposed to strictly Catholic, theme, in keeping with the Paulists' mission to "reach those outside the church."



A looming statue of St. Paul, under *Insight* end credits. Courtesy of Paulist Productions.